

Fidgety

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/16843888) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/16843888>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion , Elder Scrolls
Character:	Original Characters , Haskill (Elder Scrolls) , Sheogorath (Elder Scrolls)
Additional Tags:	Original Characters - Freeform
Stats:	Published: 2018-12-04 Words: 1553

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by [TheTyphonSerpent](#)

Summary

Reesus is an old nord with a soft spot for kids. Zoe is an orphan with special needs. When he adopts her, he sets out on a mission to understand and help her, catching the attention of a certain mad god.

Notes

This was based off a tumblr post! Check out the original and reblog it here:
<http://typhonserpent.tumblr.com/post/171215058712/>

It started with a little leather strip.

“Here.” Reesus said, pressing the scrap of leather into Zoe’s palm, “Now you have something special to chew on, so you won’t make any more holes in your dress.”

The wide-eyed Breton girl met his expectant gaze, his own eyes marred with crows feet and wrinkles. A tiny babe abandoned at the orphanage, chewing on her hair, chewing on her nails, chewing on her clothes, whatever she got her hands on went into her mouth.

“She’s mute.” The priestess behind him chimed, her gold hood pulled over her hair, “Aged six and never said a word. She won’t respond.”

Zoe’s eyes wandered to the strip in her hand. She rose it to her mouth, and gave it an experimental bite before returning to Reesus. She chewed it a couple of times, then nodded as though her head had become possessed with joy.

“You’re welcome.” The old Nord chuckled. He rose a hand, then stopped, remembering himself, “May I touch your head?”

She nodded. He ruffled her hair.

The priestess had already moved onto a boy who was sitting at the table, leaning over behind him. She pointed at one of the letter’s he’d written, and Reesus tuned out whatever criticism she had over his penmanship as he picked up his burlap bag and donned his coat.

A week later, he returned with the bag full again. Apples, carrots, and whatever toys he’d been able to make in his free time. Since retiring, he had a lot of free time, and enough gold saved to make a hobby out of his former career as a leather worker. One of the blond-haired little girls watched him intently, and her jaw dropped as he produced a ragdoll. Shaky hands had sewn old socks together in a crooked stitching pattern and made a surprisingly cute horse with a yarn mane and button eyes. As he held it out to her, her eyes lit up, and she snatched up the new toy without hesitation.

Zoe was standing behind her as she skipped away, slobbering over her whole hand as she gnawed on her thumbnail.

“Where’s your chewing toy?” He asked, cocking his head. He was always careful to keep his voice as level as possible around her, she didn’t react well to shouting or harsh words. Her eyes lowered, and she tugged on her hair, bringing one strand into her mouth to join her thumb.

“She chewed it to shreds yesterday.” The priestess said with a shake of her head, “Leather was too soft, and she got half way through it before she ... um ... that thing she does.” She spread her fingers out and straightened her arm out, striking her palm down at the air, “You know.”

Reesus mimicked the gesture while facing her. She nodded, also swiping her palm down through the air. “It means she’s done with it. She did that once when you tried teaching her to write, remember? She’s bored.”

The priestess clicked her tongue, turning away from them.

He returned a week later with a new toy.

This one was a pouch. He’d taken two circular patches of leather and boiled one to make it hard, then sewed them together back-to-back. “So it has more than one texture.” He explained as he showed it to the priestess, “And I frayed the ends of the cord so it would be a bit more like her hair, but this way she doesn’t swallow any of her hair. And I pressed a pattern into this half so she can switch if she gets bored with the smooth part.” He spread the pouch out flat so that he could show her the winding knot pattern. “It’s on a long string, too.” He continued, “So she can wear it around her neck.”

The priestess was resting her head in her hand, idly scribbling notes on a piece of paper. She sighed, shaking her head, “I don’t know why you bother. She’ll be gone soon.”

Though Reesus had wrinkles all over his body and more white hair than ever, His mood never dropped so fast in his life. “Why?”

Sighing again, she set her quill aside so she could address him properly, “I can’t keep children who pose a danger to others.”

“She’s never hit another child in her life!”

She rubbed her temple, “No, but she had another episode where she hit herself. She broke her own

nose, Reesus.”

“Did you redirect her focus? Give her a toy? I’ve donated enough of them, it shouldn’t have been hard!”

“I can’t be giving her special attention when I have other children to attend to.”

“Why *not*?”

Groaning, she leaned back in her chair, running her hands over her face. The bags under her eyes were tugged down as she took a deep breath to compose herself, “I’m sorry, Reesus. But I’ve already made the arrangements. Unless she’s adopted within the next week, she’s going to the sanitarium.”

Which was how, at over 50 years old and living in a tiny cottage, Reesus wound up with a daughter.

The first time he’d took her to the market, he held her hand the entire time. She’d been staring wide-eyed at the crowd behind him while Reesus argued with the baker over prices, when she collapsed on her back and began to scream. People were talking, so many people, so loud, she shut down, and he’d had to carry her home early.

So he made her a little hat, with thick wool stuffed into the sides. That way she could wear it and shut out the noises if they became too loud.

He tried taking her to the temple once. She liked music, and was awed by the voice of the choir as they sang praises to the Nine. But sitting still so long wasn’t good for her, and when she started to remove her clothes, he quietly shuffled her outdoors.

When they were alone they were fine. No people, no noise, he would walk by his side while he gathered crab apples and wild berries in the woods. She was like any other child then, excitedly wandering away only to return with a rock or a bug she’d found. She always had to be doing something with her hands. When they sat down for dinner, she played with her food. So he made her a few more toys. A little wood cube with a wheel in the center she could spin so she wouldn’t play with her food. A stuffed bear she could squeeze while she slept so she wouldn’t toss and turn for hours.

On one of their walks, he found a fallen branch and used it as his chance to make something *really* special. Every two inches there was something different for her to do. A little leather loop that she could tug, some carvings she could run her fingers over, a metal spring screwed into the wood so it made a familiar *twang* when she thrummed it. He’d embedded a stone at the top that was cool and smooth to the touch. There was even the same wheel he’d put on her cube, tinier this time, attached by a rod so it would spin freely. She took her special staff *everywhere*. Shopping, temple, gardening, gathering. She even slept with it next to her bed.

Two years he’d been raising her, and her mood had improved greatly since she’d been in the orphanage. Not so many meltdowns, and she knew what to fidget with when she needed to. He could take her almost anywhere and nobody commented, aside from asking if she was mage with the staff she carried around.

He had already dozed off after tucking her in. It was late enough to be silent, not even the howl of wolves to disturb them, until he felt a tiny hand shake his shoulder, and a voice he’d never heard before spoke.

“Daddy, there’s someone at the door.”

Achy bones be damned, that voice made him scramble to a sitting position. She had her pouch grasped in her hand, inches away from her mouth. “Zoe?” He breathed, leaning towards her, “What did you say?”

“There’s someone at the-” When there was a knock at the door, she shut down again, her chewing pouch going right into her mouth.

“Coming!” He called. He pulled on a pair of drawstring pants, grumbling. Zoe clung to his pant leg as he shuffled to the door, hiding behind him when he opened it.

A thin, balding Breton stood on the other side, his black and red suit clearly sewn by the finest hands, intricate patterns woven to indicate royalty. At first glance, the guards that flanked either side of him looked like a high elf and a dark elf. Staring at them for more than a second Reesus couldn’t place his finger on *what* they were. Their ears and meaty figures screamed human, but their skin was not like any human he’d ever met. Their *eyes* were piercing most of all, focused, viscous, ready to strike.

The man in the collared suit cleared his throat, redirected Reesus focus back to him. “Reesus Malene?” He said, holding out his hand for a shake, “Haskill, Chamberlain to Lord Sheogorath. I have a proposition for you and your daughter.”

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